

Commanders' Responsibilities in the Operations Process during the 1864 Red River Expedition

A Monograph

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Abstract

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A commander has the responsibility to understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess his forces during the operations process. Failure to abide by any one of these responsibilities may lead to a disruption in operations. Failure to abide by every single one will lead to complete mission failure. In 1864, Union Major General Nathaniel P. Banks led his Army of the Gulf and all attachments to a political and military defeat in the Red River Valley. Ordered by President Abraham Lincoln to secure cotton and votes in Louisiana, Banks led his men on a two-month, ill-planned, and poorly executed campaign between Alexandria, Louisiana and Little Rock, Arkansas. Despite operating with a numerically superior force, Banks's inability to understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess his forces led to a major Union defeat, resulting in the unnecessary loss of men and equipment while setting back the Union Army's entire campaign to defeat the South.

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Acronyms

ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
JCCW	Joint Report on the Committee on the Conduct of the War
OR	Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies
ORN	Official Record of the Union and Confederate Navies
UVDDLA	Understand, Visualize, Describe, Direct, Lead, and Assess
CCIR	Commander's Critical Information Requirements
EEFI	Essential Elements of Friendly Information

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Introduction

Commanders are the most important participants in the operations process. While staffs perform essential functions that amplify the effectiveness of operations, commanders drive the operations process through understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations.

–ADRP 5-0

Commanders of military organizations, from battalion through corps, are critical parts of the operations process. Commanders have the responsibility not only to understand the environment in which they and their forces operate, but also to provide guidance that takes into account the operational environment. Failure to provide contextual guidance based upon a correct understanding of operational environment can lead to wasted resources, unnecessary loss of life, and mission failure. As per chapter one of ADRP 5-0 *The Operations Process*, the first principle of the operations process requires that the commander be the driving force behind the operations process.¹ The commander drives the operations process through six steps, the first four occurring sequentially (understand, visualize, describe, and direct) and the remaining two (lead and assess) occurring throughout the operations process.² Following these six steps, the commander places himself in a position to provide guidance and orders that pertain specifically to the operational environment in which he operates.

Throughout history, commanders who failed to adhere to these basic concepts placed their units in a position where expected victory often turned to unexpected defeat. An example of this occurred in the spring of 1864 for Union commanders fighting in Louisiana. Under the command of Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, Union ground forces, working in concert with the navy, embarked on a seventy-day campaign to seize Shreveport, Louisiana and secure access

¹ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 17 May 2012), 1-3.

² Ibid.

to cotton in the region. The genesis of the campaign came from political pressure from New England politicians and textile mill owners on President Abraham Lincoln regarding the waning cotton supplies feeding northeastern mills.³ Owners of textile factories looked to Lincoln to provide some form of military-backed government intervention to secure access to the substantial supply of cotton found in Louisiana and the Lone Star state. These factory owners had significant political sway not only in New England but also within Washington, DC, and Lincoln needed all the support he could gather for the upcoming presidential elections in the fall of 1864. An additional source of pressure came from the recent occupation of Mexico City by French forces in June 1863. This act of aggression stirred fears that France, led by Britain, might recognize the Confederacy.⁴

In a note to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Lincoln made his opinion on the issue final when he asked, “Can we not renew the effort to organize a force to go to Western Texas?” with the injunction to “Please consult the General-in-Chief on the subject.”⁵ With this, Lincoln unknowingly set in motion a sequence of events that led to a major Union setback in the trans-Mississippi West.

Receiving Lincoln’s request via the secretary of war, Major General Henry Halleck sent word to Banks in July 1863, that “While your army is engaged in cleaning out Southwestern Louisiana, every preparation should be made for an expedition into Texas.”⁶ Banks, assigned as commander of the Department of the Gulf and headquartered in New Orleans since 1862,

³ Ludwell H. Johnson, *Red River Campaign: Politics & Cotton in the Civil War* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1993), 34.

⁴ Gary D. Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End: The Red River Campaign of 1864* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 8.

⁵ United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 1, vol. 26, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1889), 659. (Hereafter cited as *O.R.*)

⁶ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, pt. 1, 653.

received specific guidance from Lincoln to secure the Mississippi River and ascend the Red River in order to secure an outlet for sugar and cotton from Louisiana.⁷ Banks embraced his role as a military officer whenever possible, especially when it enhanced his ability to serve political agendas. Good transition

Banks was a politician in an officer's uniforms. Prior to the war, Banks served as the Massachusetts Speaker of the House, Speaker of U.S. House of Representative in 1858, and as a contender for the Republican presidential nomination in 1860, running against Lincoln.⁸ He knew politics and understood the importance of having the support of the people. As such, Banks focused much of his efforts on encouraging neutral and loyal Southern citizens to swear an oath of allegiance to the Union, serving to bolster Lincoln's attempt to begin a pro-Union movement from the South.⁹ In an open letter to the people of Louisiana, Banks extended an invitation to hold open elections for not only a state governor but also positions such as lieutenant-governor, secretary of state, treasurer, attorney general, and superintendent of public instruction.¹⁰ Banks understood the role that politics played within the execution of war, and put his full effort behind any politically related event.

Prior to the Red River Campaign in 1864, Banks had twice attempted to enter Texas through its coastline. In late August 1863, Banks had sent orders to Major General William Franklin to mobilize his forces and attack at Sabine Pass, Texas and continue through to Beaumont and then to Houston.¹¹ Franklin took with him one brigade from his First Division

⁷ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 15, 590.

⁸ James G. Hollandsworth, Jr., *Pretense of Glory: The Life of General Nathaniel P. Banks* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 13-41.

⁹ Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 95.

¹⁰ *O.R.*, ser. 3, vol. 4, 22.

¹¹ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, pt. 1, 287-288.

along with his Third Division, both from the XIX Corps.¹² Unfortunately, the attack failed before it even began, as two of the gunboats grounded in the coastal mudflats and the small Confederate defending force repelled the remaining Union forces from making the required landing.¹³ Discouraged by the return of his attacking force to New Orleans, Banks ordered Franklin to make a second attempt at landing along the coast. This second attempt succeeded when Union forces landed at Brownsville, Matagorda Bay, Aransas Pass, and Rio Grande City.¹⁴ Despite the paltry number of troops who successfully made the landing, Banks proudly announced to Halleck “on November 2, at meridian, the flag of the Union was raised on Brazos Island, which is now in our possession.”¹⁵ Brazos Island, even in contemporary times, was nothing more than sand dunes and seaweed covered beaches and so provided no military or political advantage to the Union. Despite this small victory along the uninhabited Texas coastline, Halleck expressed a passive displeasure at having not been notified of the second attack prior to commencement, going so far as to tell Banks not to expect any re-enforcements in this endeavor.¹⁶ So was the stage at the onset of the Red River Campaign.

The basic concept of the campaign sought to use the Red River and its surrounding area as an avenue of approach into Shreveport. Unfortunately, victory did not lie within the hands of the numerically superior Union. The campaign resulted in a disgraced Banks returning south, fleeing central Louisiana amidst the charred ruins of the pro-Union town of Alexandria, set ablaze by his own forces.¹⁷ Major General William T. Sherman, though not involved personally in the

¹² Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 37.

¹³ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, pt. 1, 290.

¹⁴ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 9-10.

¹⁵ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, pt. 1, 397.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 834-835.

¹⁷ Lawrence Van Alstyne, *Diary of an Enlisted Man* (New Haven, CT: Tuttle, Morehouse, and Taylor, 1910), 321.

campaign, but who provided 10,000 troops under the command of Brigadier General A. J. Smith, best summarized the ordeal as “one damned blunder from beginning to end.”¹⁸ Banks laid blame on the river, the separation of his ground forces, his movement formations, and the limited time in which to execute the campaign as his reasons for failure.¹⁹ Union Rear-Admiral David D. Porter placed the failure of the expedition squarely upon one of its driving motivators: cotton.²⁰ The lenses of Understanding, Visualizing, Describing, Directing, Leading, and Assessing (UVDDLA) enable the student to address and analyze the processes through which senior Union leaders and commanders approached the Red River Campaign, particularly the Red River expedition. While UVDDLA did not exist in military doctrine such as it appears today, using the backdrop of the Red River expedition helps to illustrate the consequences of neglecting the six responsibilities of the commander in the operations process. Though multiple Union leaders fluctuated in their ability to understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess, it was Bank’s failure to do all six successfully that led to the Union loss during the Red River Campaign.

A Summary of the Red River Expedition

The winter of 1863-64 was one of heady optimism for Union leaders. Their success following the great victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg in July 1863 fueled common opinion that the end of the war was near.

—Gary D. Joiner, *One Damned Blunder from Beginning to End*

The Red River Campaign, consisting of the Red River and Camden expeditions, commenced in the first week of March 1864, and involved approximately 15,000 troops under

¹⁸ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, xix.

¹⁹ *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War: The Red River Expedition*. 38th Cong., 2d sess., vol. 5 (repr., Wilmington, NC: Broadford Publishing, 1999), 340. (Hereafter referred to as *J.C.C.W.*).

²⁰ *J.C.C.W.*, 278.

Major General Frederick Steele, 17,000 troops from the Department of the Gulf under Franklin, 10,000 troops under A. J. Smith, for a total of nearly 42,000 ground and naval forces.²¹ The naval element, the Mississippi River Squadron under the command of Porter, was a formidable floating force: thirteen ironclads, four tinclads, six light-draft gunboats, and assorted supporting tugs and supply vessels.²² Though a ground force, A. J. Smith and his men initially entered the campaign aboard transports with Porter's squadron.²³ The original campaign plan called for two southern legs to meet at Alexandria, Louisiana and then to travel north to Shreveport, Louisiana where it would form a juncture with the third leg, which would arrive from Little Rock, Arkansas.²⁴ Banks originally planned for these forces to meet in Alexandria on 7 March, but due to delays from weather and terrain, the bulk of the Infantry, including Banks, did not arrive until 24-25 March.²⁵ The first vessels arrived ten days prior on 15 March.²⁶ The first battle between Union and Confederate forces had occurred on 14 March at Fort De Russy along the Red River, where a combination of forces under Smith and Porter successfully captured the small Confederate garrison with minimal Union casualties.²⁷

²¹ *J.C.C.W.*, 321.

²² Robert U. Johnson, Clarence C. Buel, eds. *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: The Way to Appomattox* (New York: Castle Books, 1956), 362; Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 39-40.

²³ *J.C.C.W.*, 322.

²⁴ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 39.

²⁵ *J.C.C.W.* 321-322.

²⁶ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 94.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

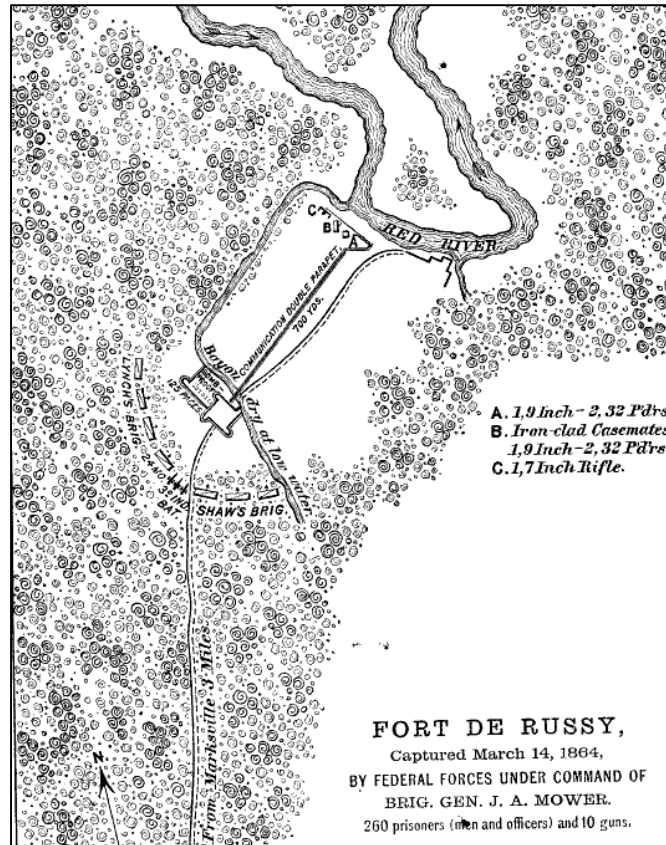


Figure 1. Fort De Russy, 14 March 1864²⁸

Source: *O.R.*, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 244.

From the time Union Brigadier General Joseph A. Mower ordered the charge of his Third Division, XVI Corps, it took only twenty minutes to storm the defenses and take three hundred nineteen prisoners and ten pieces of artillery.²⁹ The following day, Porter and Smith continued to Alexandria where A. J. Smith remained until 21 March, when he and four brigades traveled north

²⁸ The map states that Union forces captured two hundred ninety prisoners, though A. J. Smith recorded three hundred nineteen in his official record of the battle.

²⁹ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 305.

to Henderson's Hill, defeating Confederate Colonel William Vincent's Second Louisiana Cavalry, capturing four artillery pieces and over two hundred prisoners.³⁰

Once all forces arrived in Alexandria, Banks staged there while the remainder of Porter's vessels made the passage through the shallow rapids just above the city and while Porter and Banks worked through the issue of who owned and controlled the local cotton.³¹ On 27 March, A. J. Smith and his command, aboard twenty-six transports, began travel to Grand Ecore, Louisiana. The following day Franklin with the remaining XIX Corps and XIII Corps elements began his march northwest to the same location, arriving at Natchitoches, four miles south from Grand Ecore.³² Based upon a recommendation from a local river pilot, Wellington Withenbury, Banks then decided to move his forces west from Grand Ecore, toward Pleasant Hill, where Union forces would make their first significant contact with the Confederate Army.³³

The Battle of Mansfield, also referred to as Sabine Crossroads, occurred 8 April and served as a significant blow to Banks and his men.³⁴ Franklin and his forces marched head-on, in near column formation, into two Confederate divisions under the command of Brigadier General Alfred Mouton and Major General John Walker.³⁵ Walker and Mouton proceeded to push Franklin's forces back down the now congested road he had just traveled, resulting in an all-out retreat by the Union.³⁶ Franklin and his men retreated to Pleasant Grove, and then subsequently

³⁰ *J.C.C.W.*, 322; Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction: Personal Experiences of the Late War*, ed. Richard B. Harwell (New York: Longman's, Green, and Co., 1955), 188.

³¹ Johnson, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*; 350; Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 101-105.

³² Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 110-112.

³³ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁴ *J.C.C.W.*, 324.

³⁵ Johnson, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 352-353.

³⁶ *J.C.C.W.*, 325.

Pleasant Hill, where the Union would finally make a stand, bloody as it was, against the attacking Confederates.

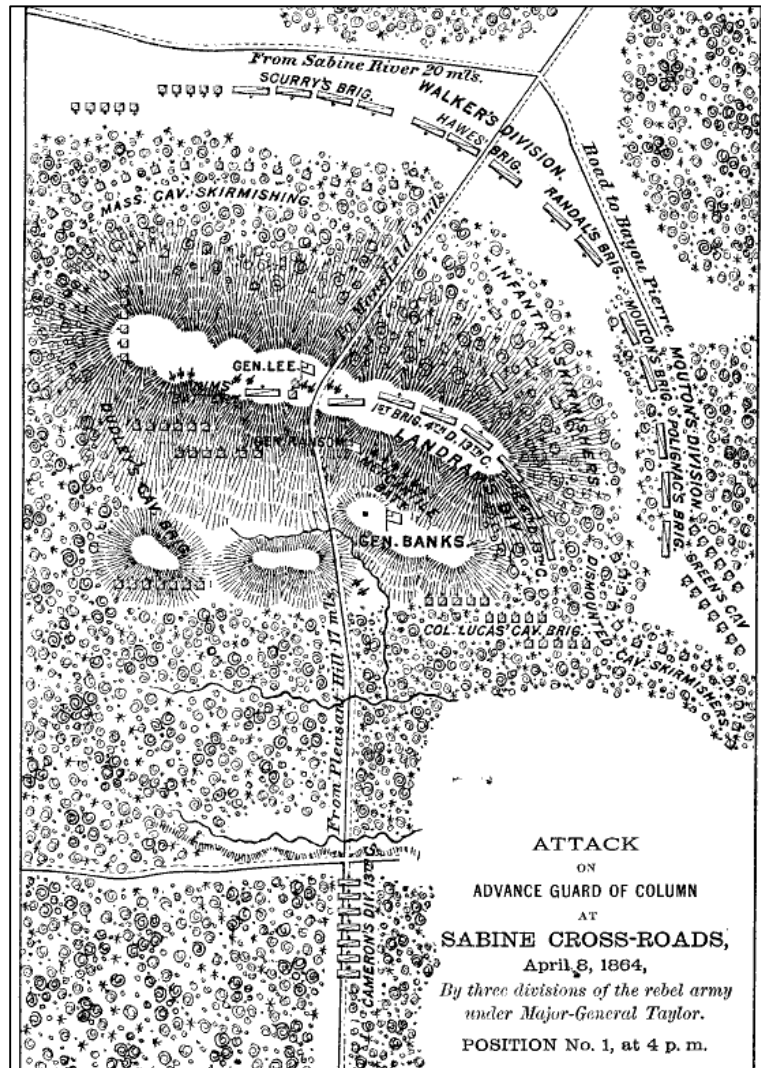


Figure 2. Battle of Mansfield (Sabine Crossroads), 8 April 1864

Source: O.R. series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 227.

The Battle of Pleasant Hill occurred the following morning, 9 April.³⁷ Union and Confederate forces battled furiously, each side gaining and losing ground throughout the day. A.

³⁷ J.C.C.W., 325.

J. Smith proved to be the saving-grace of the day, ordering a charge against the Confederate forces late in the day, driving a wedge between the line and bringing a close to the day's fighting, resulting in neither great victory nor decisive defeat for either side.³⁸ In total, the Union lost 1,065 killed, wounded, or captured.³⁹ Despite holding the ground, Banks ordered his troops back to Grand Ecore that night, and ultimately back to Alexandria ten days later.⁴⁰



Figure 3. Battle of Pleasant Hill, 9 April 1864

Source: O.R., series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 230.

Once again, Banks, Porter and Franklin found themselves back in Alexandria, only heading in the opposite direction from when they last convened there. Due to the continually

³⁸ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 115.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴⁰ J.C.C.W., 328-330.

decreasing water level of the Red River, Porter and his vessels were unable to make the passage through the Alexandria rapids. After sitting in defensive positions around Alexandria, Union forces then proceeded to construct a temporary dam in order to raise the water level high enough to allow Porter and his vessels to pass south.⁴¹ Following nearly two weeks of construction under the guidance of Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Bailey, all of Porter's vessels successfully passed the rapids and broke south on 12 May, never to head north along the Red River again.⁴² The following day, Banks and the remaining forces in Alexandria resumed their retreat towards Simmesport, Louisiana, along the Atchafalaya River.⁴³ Though a pro-Union city, Alexandria bore the same fate as many southern cities as the departing Union forces set ablaze many of the homes and businesses, leaving the a large portion of the city destroyed.⁴⁴ The last two major skirmish between Union and Confederate forces occurred during the retreat, at Mansura and Yellow Bayou, 16 and 18 May respectively.⁴⁵ Neither battle proved significant in changing the fate of the campaign. Despite the Confederate attempt to halt the Union retreat, Bank and his forces left the Red River Valley and thus ended the campaign on 20 May 1864.

As a result of his failed campaign, Banks was relieved of command and replaced by Major General Edward Canby on 19 May. Banks resigned from the army in June 1865, following an extensive investigation by the Joint Committee on the Conduct of War; despite the fact, neither he nor any Union leaders had any negative action taken against them because of the failed campaign.

⁴¹ *J.C.C.W.*, 332-333.

⁴² Johnson, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 358-360.

⁴³ *J.C.C.W.*, 335.

⁴⁴ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 169.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 170-171.

Understand

Understanding is fundamental to the commander's ability to establish a situation's context. It is essential to effective decision making during planning and execution.

–ADRP 5-0

The greater the level of understanding that a commander has prior to executing any operation, regardless of its size or complexity, the greater the likelihood of success. Commanders need a certain level of understanding of the operational environment before they can adequately dispense guidance to subordinates. Without adequate understanding, the commander may misunderstand the influence that his actions have on the environment, or the environment on operations, and may ultimately fail to meet his desired military endstate.

Many factors can impede the commander's ability to gather the requisite data, information, or intelligence needed to understand the operational environment. Time, resources, and experience are all obstacles that may stand within the commander's way of fully understanding his environment. For Banks, his understanding of the Red River Valley applied more to the political, rather than military aspects.

Banks was a politician first, and an officer second. His optimism at turning the political affiliation of the local Louisiana population stood at the forefront of everything he did. As part of his duty to increase the pro-Union sentiment in Louisiana, Banks arranged for an extravagant inaugural ceremony in March 1864 for the newly elected Governor of Louisiana, Michael Hahn.⁴⁶ Major General William T. Sherman, who traveled to New Orleans in early March to discuss troop deployments in support of the campaign with Banks, noted in his memoirs,

Banks urged me to remain over the 4th of March, to participate in the ceremonies which he explained would include the performance of the "Anvil Chorus" by all the bands of his army, and during the performance the church-bells were to be rung, and cannons were to

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 83.

be fired by electricity. I regarded all such ceremonies out of place at a time when it seemed to me every hour and every minutes were due to war.⁴⁷

Banks's flair for the dramatic played to the population. He understood the strategic value of the support of the Louisiana governor and his constituents. He knew Lincoln needed the support of Louisiana, if not for the fact that geographically it controlled a great deal of the Mississippi River, but also constricted the base of support for the Confederacy. Banks also understood the significance of securing the local cotton. Nicknamed the "Bobbin Boy," Banks grew up among the cotton mills of Waltham, Massachusetts, and understood the great significance that cotton had to the economy of not only New England, but the Union as a whole.⁴⁸ Banks estimated there to be over 100,000 bales of cotton in Louisiana, and so by securing them from the "rebel government" he recognized the potential for fuller employment in the Northeast, a significant influx of gold, not only into the Department of Treasury, but from European investors as well.⁴⁹ Banks may have understood the larger political picture, but his understanding of the military actions required for victory fell far short.

Banks was late for his own campaign by nearly two weeks. Movement of troops to Alexandria, Louisiana began on 10 March 1864, when Sherman authorized the release of Brigadier General A.J. Smith and his ten thousand troops of his XVI and XVII Corps, to support Banks.⁵⁰ In his orders to Smith, Sherman gave him explicit instructions to proceed no farther than Shreveport and to remain with Banks no longer than thirty days following Smith's arrival at Alexandria.⁵¹ This timeline would become significant in the campaign, as it served as a forcing

⁴⁷ William Tecumseh Sherman. *Memoirs of General W. T. Sherman*, ed. Michael Fellman (New York: Penguin, 2000), 367.

⁴⁸ Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 3-7.

⁴⁹ *J.C.C.W.*, 355.

⁵⁰ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 34; Sherman, *Memoirs*, 372.

⁵¹ Sherman, *Memoirs*, 373.

function for Banks to decide whether to continue north to Shreveport or to retreat to Alexandria. Banks did not arrive until 24 March, due to his extended stay with Governor Hahn following the elaborate inauguration ceremony.⁵² Banks did not understand the importance that his presence would have maintaining order and discipline within his ranks. Though Banks understood the bigger political picture, he failed to understand the influence that Admiral David Porter and men had upon the town of Alexandria when they arrived nearly ten days before Banks.

Porter's first vessel arrived in Alexandria on 15 March, whereupon he and his men immediately set upon securing the openly available cotton.⁵³ Porter's men spread out along a six to ten mile stretch on either side of the river near Alexandria, collecting and bailing all available cotton.⁵⁴ In an effort to legitimize the seizure of the cotton by claiming it as Confederate Army property, rather than civilian, sailors stenciled CSA on the bails, which later came to mean "Cotton Stealing Association" among those in the town.⁵⁵ Banks was unaware of Porter's implementation of the Naval Prize Law and how this seemingly took priority over the larger political strategy from Washington regarding cotton in Alexandria. According to this law, the navy could seize war prizes, in this case cotton, and turn them over to an admiralty court, which would condemn, and then sell the cotton, and return some of the proceeds to the captors.⁵⁶ Porter defended the navy's procurement of the cotton stating "the naval officer acted by direct authority of the Navy and Treasury Department; besides the laws of war authorized them to take possession of all contraband goods and make a return thereof to the Government."⁵⁷ Banks failed to take this

⁵² *J.C.C.W.*, 322.

⁵³ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 59.

⁵⁴ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 18.

⁵⁵ *J.C.C.W.*, 81.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 18, 71, 74, 224-225.

⁵⁷ David D. Porter, *Naval History of the Civil War* (New York: Sherman Publishing, 1886), 534.

into consideration prior to entering Alexandria, and so upon his arrival into the city could do nothing but recommend that the local population bring the cotton to him for transport to New Orleans.⁵⁸ In a letter written to the chief quartermaster of the Department of the Gulf, Assistant Quartermaster Captain D .N. Welch noted “the navy is seizing all that cotton they can get hold of. Every gun-boat is loaded with cotton and the officer are taking it without regard...of the owner. It looks to me like a big steal.”⁵⁹ Between the two senior leaders, Porter understood the situation he faced in Alexandria better than Banks, and as a result, exploited the opportunity to the fullest.

Admiral Porter understood the military aspects of the campaign far better than Banks, though he still recognized the role that politics played. To him, the politics of the matter, more specifically the issue regarding cotton, was the reason that the campaign failed.⁶⁰ Porter noted to the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, “There was too much attention paid to getting cotton. The army should not have gone into that business at all; they should have pushed on at once.... Instead of that, days and days were spent by teams hauling cotton into town.”⁶¹ At his core, Porter was a military man. He had grown up in the shadow of his commodore father, serving for a time in the Mexican Navy as a teenager, fighting pirates in the Caribbean, and even procuring camels from Turkey under the direction of then Secretary of War Jefferson Davis in order to study their use in desert environments.⁶² Familiar with the Mississippi as well as the Red River from years spent traversing its waters, Porter knew that the conditions of the river were not the most ideal for him and his over one hundred support vessels. In a general report made in

⁵⁸ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 18.

⁵⁹ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 2, 655.

⁶⁰ *J.C.C.W.*, 277.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Chester G. Hearn, *Admiral David Dixon Porter: The Civil War Years* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996).

September of 1863, Porter noted, “I have just returned from the mouth of the Red River, where I went to see what could be done to cooperate with General Banks. As I knew before hand, the river was quite dry in places, and a dry bar formed across the head of the Old River.”⁶³ In his testimony to Congress, Porter said that he had protested multiple times to Banks regarding taking his vessels north up the Red River for fear of getting them caught in the shallow waters.⁶⁴ Porter knew his vessels, he knew their ability to maneuver in the brown waters of the Red River, and he knew what to expect. It was only after Banks convinced him that the success of the campaign rested upon the shoulders of the navy, did Porter finally give in to Bank’s requests.⁶⁵

The waters of the Red River in 1864 were far lower than what normally occurred during the spring.⁶⁶ Because of this, Porter understood the vulnerable position his vessels were in and that the possibility of running aground at any point between Alexandria and Shreveport was very likely. Porter also recognized the fact that Banks was perhaps in over his head with the campaign and that there was a very real possibility that Banks would retreat south, leaving Porter stranded on the Red River with no support.⁶⁷ Porter communicated often with Major General Sherman, reaffirming the gratitude he had for the 10,000 additional men provided, more to support Porter, than Banks, in the campaign. Despite his initial eagerness to support Banks, Porter understood the weak positions he and his vessels were in due to the low river waters and repeated defeats of

⁶³ United States War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, vol. 25 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1912), 413. (Hereafter cited as *O.R.N.*).

⁶⁴ *J.C.C.W.*, 275.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁶⁶ *O.R.N.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, 62.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Union forces on land. As a result, he recalled his ships to Alexandria, approximately forty-five days after attacking north from the very same city.⁶⁸

Both Banks and Porter understood the operational environment in which their forces operated, but not the complete picture. Banks knew the political implications of securing the additional voters, as well as the cotton in the area. He recognized how his actions could further the Lincoln's political goals of success in the west. Porter saw the value of the cotton, more so in what it meant to him financially, rather than to Lincoln and US government. Porter could also see how the physical environment, as well as the lack of support from Banks, prevented him from going any further north up the Red River. Porter's understanding of the environment focused more on the actual fighting between the Union and Confederate forces in the immediate area, rather than how the success of the campaign furthered the Union's cause.

Visualize

As commanders begin to understand their operational environment and the problem, they start to visualize a desired end state and potential solutions to solve the problem. Collectively, this is known as commander's visualization—the mental process of developing situational understanding, determining a desired endstate, and envisioning an operational approach by which the force will achieve the end state.

—ADRP 5-0

Visualization is the next step a commander takes in the operations process. Once he understands the operational environment in which he finds himself, he then proceeds to develop an endstate to this his operation. This endstate describes a set of future conditions, which can be either military or political, that when reached constitute success in the eyes of the commander. A higher military or political authority may dictate or influence the desired endstate, or it may come entirely from the individual commander himself. Regardless, it is essential that the endstate take

⁶⁸ *O.R.N.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, 67-68.

into consideration the operational environment or risk a misalignment or waste of time and resources. In addition to the endstate, the commander will begin to visualize the operational approach he will take to achieve his endstate.⁶⁹ As with understanding the operational environment, it may be difficult to determine the level and depth of the commander's visualization as it occurs predominantly in the cognitive realm. A commander may choose to depict graphically his endstate and operational approach, thus transferring his visualization into something he and his subordinate can actually see. Otherwise, as was the case with Union leaders during the Red River expedition, one can only infer from their actions and correspondence between one another how successful they were at visualizing their endstate and approach prior to execution.

Banks, despite his failure to achieve success in the campaign, did put considerable thought into its execution before embarking on the Red River. In his testimony to Congress following the failure of the campaign, Banks spoke of the five conditions he believed were crucial to the success of the campaign, which in many ways resembled an operational approach.⁷⁰ First, the campaign required simple organization of troops in order to avoid delay in movements during the campaign. Second was establishing an additional line of operation along a ground route, separate from the Mississippi. Third, Banks expected a force under the command of General Sherman operate to the west of the Mississippi to divert Confederate forces from northern Louisiana and Arkansas. Fourth, all corps had to operate in concert throughout the entire area of operation to prevent the enemy from massing against any one unit. Fifth, all forces were to remain under the command of one general thereby adhering to the concept of unity of command.⁷¹ According to Banks however "not one of these suggestions, so necessary in

⁶⁹ ADRP 5-0, 1-4.

⁷⁰ *J.C.C.W.*, 320.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

conquering the inherent difficulties of the expedition, was carried into execution nor was it in my power to establish them.”⁷² Despite demonstrating some awareness of what he understood success to entail, Bank had a number of obstacles in his way preventing his envisioned approach.

As is apparent in his testimony, Banks was aware of the potential problems that he might face during the campaign. It appeared that at some level, he took the time to visualize how he wanted to approach the Red River and his movement to Shreveport. He knew that simplicity, synchronization, and unity of command were essential to his victory, for it were these issues that added to the difficulty faced by Banks, his peers, and subordinates over the duration of the campaign. Though he may have given thought to his actions prior to the campaign, his actual operational approach proved less detailed.

In April 1865, the inspector general for Major General William B. Franklin’s XIX Corps, Colonel Charles C. Dwight, gave his testimony to Congress on what he believed Bank’s plan for the campaign actually was. According to Dwight, and speaking on behalf of Franklin’s understanding of the campaign, “the only announcement of the plan of the campaign which [Franklin] ever heard from [Banks] was... ‘One bound to Alexandria, one bound to Shreveport, one bound to the Gulf.’”⁷³ Franklin, with whom Banks entrusted all infantry forces for the campaign, apparently had very little detailed information off which to operate. Again, an interpretation of the commander’s ability to visualize his endstate and operational approach is understood best in the context of his actions. Franklin’s claim that Banks gave him only three actions in a very limited line of operation, leads one to interpret that Banks’s plan was ill-thought and lacking any depth of understanding or visualization. Cognitively, Banks may have known what he wanted, but when his senior ground commander summed up the entire campaign

⁷² *J.C.C.W.*, 320.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 400.

guidance in one sentence, it pointed to the contrary. Franklin, however, was not without fault in his ability to visualize his situation.

The first major loss of Union life occurred during the Battle of Mansfield on 8 April 1864, approximately ninety miles north of Alexandria. Choosing to take the inland route northwest, rather than following along the river road north directly to Shreveport at the behest of local guide Wellington Withenbury, Banks and his men marched directly into their first battle.⁷⁴ Franklin's failure to properly visualize, or understand for that matter, the situation before him led to his defeat. According to Brigadier General A. L. Lee, the cavalry division commander in Franklin's XIX Corps, Franklin did not expect to fight the enemy until he reached Shreveport.⁷⁵ Franklin overlooked the possibility that contact was likely along the single lane road that he and his men followed, and so enforced an order of march set by Banks, which not only congested the road, but prevented the possibility of his two infantry divisions rapidly supporting Lee's division in the lead.⁷⁶ The two trailing infantry divisions marched behind a nearly one thousand-wagon train, leaving Lee and his cavalry division first in the order of march and vulnerable to attack, which is exactly what happened.⁷⁷

Brigadier General Lee's cavalry division, with a brigade of infantry brought forward by Brigadier General Thomas Ransom's XIII Corps, first made contact with Confederate Lieutenant General Richard Taylor's forces, which then precipitated an increasing withdrawal, turned into an all-out rout, of the Union forces as "Guns, knapsacks, blankets—everything was thrown away by the frantic soldiers."⁷⁸ The route continued through to the town of Pleasant Hill, where despite a

⁷⁴ J.C.C.W., 287.

⁷⁵ J.C.C.W., 64.

⁷⁶ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 117.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ J.C.C.W., 60; Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 136-137.

victory on 9 April against the Confederates, Banks ordered a retreat further south to Grand Ecore.⁷⁹ Grand Ecore provided Banks, Franklin, and their men the opportunity to consolidate and reorganize following the two major engagements at Mansfield and Pleasant Hill. Banks admitted that at this point he had formed no particular opinion on whether or not his forces would be able to return from Shreveport even if able to continue north to the city.⁸⁰ The one Union leader whose actions did indicate both an understanding and visualization of the operational environment was Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant.

Grant had assumed command of the armies of the United States on 17 March 1864, and with it responsibility to provide guidance to Banks on his Red River Campaign.⁸¹ From the very beginning of the campaign, Grant had his focus on Mobile, rather than Shreveport, and made sure that Banks understood that as well.⁸² Grant understood the drain on resources that Banks's campaign had on the Union, and when visualizing a campaign against Mobile, Grant saw no place for Banks in Louisiana. In his order to Banks on 31 March, Grant illustrated his visualization of what success would be in that region. First, upon reaching Shreveport, Banks was to turn over control to Brigadier General Frederick Steele. Second, Banks was to keep only a small footprint in Texas along the portion of the Rio Grande which he already controlled. Third, Banks should prepare for movement toward Mobile, in conjunction with ironclad support from the navy.⁸³ In the same order, Grant also went so far as to recommend where Banks should establish his headquarters, though he deferred to Banks as he was more familiar with the region

⁷⁹ *J.C.C.W.*, 12-13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸¹ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 32, pt. 3, 83.

⁸² *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 11.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

than Grant.⁸⁴ Subsequent communications between Grant and Banks further demonstrated Grant's frustration with the campaign. Grant clearly articulated his expectations to Banks that,

If you [Banks] do not accomplish the object of your expedition...you will return to New Orleans, even if you have to abandon entirely the expedition...and if it takes you beyond the 1st of May to return to New Orleans, I shall regret that you ever started upon the expedition at all.⁸⁵

Despite Lincoln's preference for military action in the region, Grant recognized where the Union focus should be, and cotton along the Red River was not it.

It is not easy to determine how well a commander can visualize his endstate and operational approach without conferring directly with that commander. When no record exists of a commander explicitly describing how he visualized his operational environment, observing a commander's actions within a particular environment can help illuminate to an extent, what visualization possibly occurred. Observing the actions taken by both Banks and Franklin help to illustrate how a lack of proper visualization can lead to defeat. Grant, conversely, appeared to look far past the Red River Campaign and into the future. In this process, his visualization manifested into orders to Banks, which emphasized where Shreveport stood in priority to other Union plans in the East.

Describe

After commanders visualize an operation, they describe it to their staff and subordinates to facilitate shared understanding and purpose.

–ADRP 5-0

Communication between the commander and his subordinates, particularly in regard to communicating understanding and the product of his visualization, is critical for mission success. ADRP 5-0 states that the commander expresses his visualization through four components;

⁸⁴ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 11.

⁸⁵ *J.C.C.W.*, 14.

commander's intent, planning guidance to include an operational approach, commander's critical information requirements (CCIR), and essential elements of friendly information (EEFI).⁸⁶ The commander must be able to articulate to those who will either write an order or execute one, exactly how it is he understands the environment or how he visualizes his endstate or operational approach. Any misunderstanding between the commander and his subordinates risks a misinterpretation and potential mission failure. A commander may verbally describe to his subordinates how he sees the operational environment, or he may choose to put the understanding into words, such as with a mission order. The subordinate is reliant upon the commander's ability to express clearly and articulate what it is that he wants from his soldiers. Different Union leaders during the Red River expedition had varying levels of success describing to their subordinates their understanding and visualization of the operational environment.

Banks may not have been directly in charge of the infantry under his command; this responsibility fell upon Franklin's shoulders, but his orders still influenced Union actions. During the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, Banks demonstrated how his lack of understanding and visualization hindered his ability to describe what he wanted his forces to do. Just as he had done earlier in New Orleans and Alexandria, Banks set out to hold another set of elections to secure the loyalty and cotton from the people of Grand Ecore.⁸⁷ This temporary sideshow disrupted Banks from understanding the enemy and the terrain, leaving Franklin to handle all preparations to move north.⁸⁸ As a result, during some of the most intense fighting between Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, Banks sent word through his assistant adjutant general, Lieutenant Colonel George Drake, telling Franklin "you had better send back and push up the trains, as

⁸⁶ ADRP 5-0, 1-5.

⁸⁷ *J.C.C.W.*, 281.

⁸⁸ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 79.

manifestly we shall be able to rest here.”⁸⁹ “Here” referred to the area just south of Mansfield. Franklin admitted in his testimony to Congress, that he interpreted this statement to mean that Banks did not expect any significant battle.⁹⁰ Nothing could have been further from this estimate. Eight hours after Banks sent word to Franklin that he did not expect a fight, Union forces executed a full retreat from Mansfield, losing fifteen artillery pieces and another one hundred and fifty six wagons belonging to Lee’s cavalry division.⁹¹ Banks’s description of what he thought he wanted, based upon the poor understanding he had of the situation, led to the embarrassing Union defeat at Mansfield, which Porter claimed in a letter to Sherman, bore resemblance to the same chaos seen at Bull Run.⁹²

In his defense, Banks was not entirely incapable of expressing his visualization, in what is referred to in current doctrine as the Commander’s Critical Information Requirements (CCIR). Though never specifically published as a critical information requirement, the lowering water level of the Red River served as a significant point of concern to Banks. Not a nautical man, Banks still understood that if the Red River continued to drop, the vessels under Porter’s command would be unable to follow and support his infantry as they attempted to move to Shreveport. In a situation report sent to Grant following his retreat to Alexandria in April, Banks stated, “from the condition of the river, it became apparent that neither the army nor the fleet could move to Shreveport with any reasonable prospect of return.”⁹³ In his testimony to Congress, Banks discussed his concern that he had for the level of the river even before originally departing from Alexandria in March. Banks acknowledged to Congress that, “It was hazardous to

⁸⁹ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 473.

⁹⁰ *J.C.C.W.*, 30.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹² *O.R.N.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, 59.

⁹³ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 190.

undertake naval operation upon the Red river in that condition of things...unless there was enough water to float the boats.”⁹⁴ Banks stated that, despite expressing concerns about the river’s condition every thirty minutes with Porter and the other generals in Alexandria, Porter assured him that “wherever the sand was damp he could run the boats.”⁹⁵ Not explicitly stated in any order given, Banks still demonstrated that he indeed had some form, loose as it may have been, of CCIR, in this case river conditions, for his campaign.

The retreat to Alexandria in late April proved Porter’s claim of running the boats in the damp sand patently false. The low waters and rapids near Alexandria stranded Porter’s entire fleet, leaving his brown water force vulnerable to enemy destruction. One officer though, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Bailey, successfully understood, visualized, and described a plan to free the boats from their would-be sandy captor. Bailey’s experience as a logger in Wisconsin of building temporary dams to float logs downstream provided the experience to help him describe a solution to the problem.⁹⁶ Porter initially scoffed at the idea, saying “if damming would get the fleet off [we] would have been afloat long before.”⁹⁷ Porter eventually came around after Franklin and Banks both agreed that the plan seemed feasible and Banks gave the order to proceed.⁹⁸ With the support of the idle troops in Alexandria, Bailey constructed a damn spanning 758 feet made from brick, stone, barges and available furniture, which ultimately provided enough blockage to raise the Red River sufficiently to allow Porter’s vessels to pass through the falls at the city.⁹⁹ Though Bailey did not issue the order to build the dam, his ability to articulate the benefits of

⁹⁴ J.C.C.W., 8.

⁹⁵ J.C.C.W., 8

⁹⁶ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 164.

⁹⁷ J.C.C.W., 15.

⁹⁸ O.R., ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 403.

⁹⁹ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 165-168.

building a dam led to one of the only true Union success stories of the entire expedition, and campaign.



Figure 4. Bailey's Dam across the Red River

Source: O.R.N., series 1, vol. 26, 130A.

For his contributions, Bailey received official recognition from the War Department “for distinguished service in the recent campaign on the Red River, by which the gun-boat flotilla under Rear-Admiral David D. Porter was rescued from imminent peril.”¹⁰⁰

Describing an endstate and approach requires that a leader first understand and visualize the environment in which he operates. The greater the leader’s understanding and visualization, the more appropriate his description of an endstate and operational approach, or in Bailey’s case a

¹⁰⁰ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 406.

solution to a problem, will be to the operational environment. Most telling of all though lies within a response that Franklin gave during his questioning by Congress after the campaign. When asked what objectives Banks intended to accomplish during the expedition, Franklin responded, “I know nothing more than the impression I received from General Banks that he intended to march into Texas by that [Red River] route.”¹⁰¹ This comment succinctly illustrates the significant short-sighted faults behind Banks’s visualization and description of the entire campaign.

Direct

Commanders direct all aspects of operations by establishing their commander’s intent, setting achievable objectives, and issuing clear tasks to subordinate units.

–ADRP 5-0

ADRP 5-0 gives seven examples of how a commander directs in the operations process: prepare and approve plans and orders, establish command and support relationships, assign tasks and control measures, position units to maximize combat power, position key leaders, allocate resources to exploit opportunity, and commit the reserve as required.¹⁰² Though this list is not all-inclusive, as any former commander can attest, it does provide a view into a number of the commander’s responsibilities. These responsibilities are all predicated on the fact that before any form of direction can begin, the commander must have a clear understanding and visualization of the operational environment and can clearly describe what it is he wants from his subordinates. Due to the inconsistent ability of the Union commanders to do all three successfully, commanders and subordinates alike faced unnecessary difficulty before and during the Red River expedition.

¹⁰¹ *J.C.C.W.*, 31.

¹⁰² ADRP 5-0, 1-6.

The first example of poor direction occurred before the expedition even began. From the onset, Halleck provided no clear or specific guidance to Banks; rather he gave loosely veiled orders presented more in the form of recommendations than anything else. Shortly after the new year in 1864, Halleck told Banks “The best thing, it would seem, to be done under the circumstances is for you to communicate with them [Sherman and Steele], and also with Admiral Porter, in regard to some general co-operation, and all agree upon what is the best plan.”¹⁰³ In response, Banks sent correspondence to Halleck in an attempt to glean further guidance on what exactly he should do in the upcoming Red River Campaign. In the letter, Banks stated “Anxiously waiting information and instructions as to the operations on Red River.”¹⁰⁴ Approximately two weeks later, Banks sent another second letter to Halleck again seeking guidance regarding the campaign stating, “I hope the mail will bring me in regard to the operations you contemplate on the Red River country.”¹⁰⁵ Finally pushed to provide answers to Banks’s questions, Halleck provided a less than detailed response two weeks later, again placing the burden on Banks to make the decision on the campaign:

Your dispatches of January 29 and February 2 are received. In the former you speak of awaiting orders and instructions in regard to operations on Red River. If by this it is meant that you are waiting orders from Washington, there must be some misapprehension. The substance of my dispatches to you on this subject was communicated to the President and the Secretary of War, and it was understood that while stating my own views in regard to operations, I should leave you free to adopt such lines and plans of campaign as you might, after a full consideration of the subject, deem best.¹⁰⁶

Banks expressed his frustration in the matter during his testimony to Congress during its investigation of the campaign. When asked if he had received orders from Halleck prior to

¹⁰³ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 2, 16.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 266.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.

initiation of the campaign, he responded, “Yes, sir; but they were not positive orders, but rather suggestions. The difficulty in regards to this expedition was that nobody assumed to give orders; each commander acted for himself.”¹⁰⁷ As it was, Halleck left all necessary coordination between the Department of the Gulf, the Department of Arkansas, and the Department of Tennessee to the politician-general who to that point did not have a reputation for military victories.

Halleck’s second failure in preparation for the campaign was not assigning one commander over all forces involved. Although Banks was the Commander of the Department of the Gulf, he had no authority over the other generals involved.¹⁰⁸ Halleck’s failure to provide a clear line of authority only added to the confusion that Banks had coordinating between Steele, located at Little Rock to the north, Porter on the river, or Franklin, and A. J. Smith who belonged to Sherman throughout the duration of the campaign.¹⁰⁹ Of note, in a letter to Sherman toward the end of the campaign, Halleck made reference to the fact that there should be one commander but that there was no one suitable for the position, going so far as to say “General Banks is not competent...it would be useless to ask the President to do it [assign one].”¹¹⁰ The question then remains, if Halleck had so little confidence in Banks, why did he allow him to oversee the campaign? Perhaps, as historian Ludwell Johnson claimed “he was trying to avoid responsibility involved in giving orders.”¹¹¹

Whereas Halleck’s guidance provided few specifics on how to execute the campaign, Lieutenant General Grant made very clear to Banks what he expected of him. Recently promoted and assigned as commander of the armies, Grant had not yet formulated his plans for his spring

¹⁰⁷ *J.C.C.W.*, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 81.

¹⁰⁹ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 2, 16.

¹¹⁰ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 32, pt. 3, 289.

¹¹¹ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 82.

campaign that year, but he recognized that he would need all available forces, to include those under Bank's command.¹¹² To shore up forces, Grant sent his specific guidance to Banks upon Banks's initial arrival to Alexandria.

It is important that Shreveport should be taken as soon as possible. This done, send Brig. Gen. A.J. Smith with his command back to Memphis as soon as possible. This force will be necessary for movement east of the Mississippi. Should you find that taking Shreveport will occupy ten to fifteen days more time than General Sherman gave his troops..., you will send them back at the time specified in his note...even if it leads to the abandonment of the main object of your expedition.¹¹³

Grant went on further to tell Banks that if he did secure Shreveport, that he should do so only with the as much force as he deemed necessary, but to return the remainder of the troops to New Orleans.¹¹⁴ Additionally, Grant ordered Banks not to abandon, but also not to attempt to gain any additional territory west of the Mississippi, as the focus must remain on a possible move against Mobile, Alabama in the near future.¹¹⁵ In the conclusion of the letter to Banks, Grant heavily emphasized heavily that Banks must supply his forces off the occupied country, alluding to the fact that Banks should not expect any additional logistical support than that which he already had with him.¹¹⁶

Grant's order to Banks stood in stark contrast to Halleck's. He clearly defined his intent for Banks's forces, what to do in the event of both success and failure, and how to supply his forces. Grant did not provide loose recommendations or leave to Banks how to decide to pursue his campaign. Of all orders given from senior levels, Grant's clarity and precision far surpassed any up to that point. Despite the clear guidance from above, Banks still had difficulty enabling

¹¹² *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 610.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 2, 611.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

victory on the ground. With a defeat at Mansfield and a partial victory at Pleasant Hill, the momentum of the campaign shifted with a single order from Banks.

Upon the conclusion of the Battle at Pleasant Hill on 9 April 1864, Banks ordered Franklin to return his forces to Grand Ecore, a small town along the Red River, approximately forty miles straight-line distance southeast.¹¹⁷ The area around Mansfield and Pleasant Hill was the furthest north Franklin's ground forces would go during the campaign. Banks justified to Grant his order to retreat based upon a belief that Shreveport would be far more difficult to take than originally expected, coupled with the lack of support from Steele to the north and the decreasing water level of the Red.¹¹⁸ What was most concerning about Banks's ability to lead his forces at this time was the disjointed nature in which he disseminated the order to retreat. Franklin and A. J. Smith both received their orders from Banks to withdraw to Grand Ecore on 9 April. Smith did not take the order well, as it meant leaving his dead unburied. He disliked the order so much so that he requested Franklin arrest Banks and assume control of campaign.¹¹⁹ Unlike Franklin and Smith, Porter did not receive the order for the army to retreat.

Admiral Porter and his vessels had previously departed from Grand Ecore on 7 April, heading upstream to Loggy Bayou, approximately 100 miles.¹²⁰ Reaching near his destination, Porter had to halt his vessels as Confederate forces had placed the steamer *New Falls City* across a narrow portion of the river, and blocked further progress. Porter later noted that some Confederate wit had left a hand written invitation to Porter on the *New Fall City*, inviting him "to attend a ball in Shreveport."¹²¹ It was while delayed at this point in the river that a courier, a

¹¹⁷ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 100.

¹¹⁸ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 187-188.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 309.

¹²⁰ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 207.

¹²¹ *O.R.N.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, 60.

Captain Andrews, came with a verbal order for Smith to retreat, with no guidance to inform Porter of the same.¹²² Had Porter not been with Smith it is difficult to tell how that would have delayed the retreat. It was only after conferring with Porter and taking into consideration their distance from Banks and the river condition that the two men decided to return to Grand Ecore.¹²³ To add insult to injury, Banks left Porter out of the loop a second time when he failed to inform him upon the second retreat, this time from Grand Ecore back to Alexandria.

Banks knew he could go no further, “When, from the condition of the river, it became apparent that neither the army nor the fleet could move to Shreveport... I directed that the army should fall back to Alexandria.”¹²⁴ Porter was under a much different impression, as one of his subordinates, Lieutenant Commander Thomas Selfridge, had received word from Banks directly that “I [Banks] shall entertain no thought of retrograde movement, certainly not if it leaves the navy in danger. No such purpose is contemplated now.”¹²⁵ However, while in Grand Ecore, Porter recalled in his congressional testimony a slightly different set of conditions.

General Franklin came to me at one time, and asked me if I had been informed that General Banks was going to retreat to Alexandria. I said “No, sir; on the contrary, General Banks has just informed me that it was his intention to hold the country.” General Franklin said, “I assure you there is no such intention; orders have already been issued for the army to retire, and I have received an order to conduct a retreat.” I thought that was very singular, and sent Captain Selfridge to see General Banks. He assured Captain Selfridge that he had not the faintest idea of leaving.¹²⁶

Though Porter’s confusion may have simply been a result of timing and cross communication, it still points to the fact that Banks had difficulty ensuring that he kept his subordinates or fellow

¹²² *J.C.C.W.*, 203.

¹²³ *J.C.C.W.*, 203.

¹²⁴ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 190.

¹²⁵ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, pt. 1, 64.

¹²⁶ *J.C.C.W.*, 278.

commander properly informed of his directions. Banks would add one last black mark to his character before the campaign ended; failure to follow Grant's orders.

Banks knew from the beginning of the campaign that Sherman's men, under the command of A. J. Smith, were only on temporary loan. The difficulties he faced at Mansfield, Pleasant Hill, and the river conditions all slowed his original timeline. As a result, the thirty-day timeline that Grant gave to Banks came and went. Sherman sent Brigadier General John Corse to inform Banks of the expired due date, informing Banks of his intention to have Smith and his men move on Decatur, Alabama by way of the Yazoo River.¹²⁷ In response Banks informed Sherman, "I cannot conceive that your order would have been given had you known the circumstance, and therefore I have been compelled to say to General Smith that I could not approve it at this moment."¹²⁸ Grant had had enough. Upon being informed by Halleck of this state of affairs, Grant replied,

A.J. Smith will have to stay with General Banks until the gunboats are out of difficulty. General Banks ought to be ordered to New Orleans and have all further execution on the Red River in other hands. I have just recently received two letters...giving deplorable accounts of General Banks' mismanagement. His own reports and these letters clearly show that all his disasters to be attributed to his incompetency. Send troops for General Sherman where he wants them.¹²⁹

With that, Halleck sent official word to Banks on 27 April that his services were no longer required in the Red River Valley, and that upon receipt of the letter he was to return to New Orleans and have either Major General Steele, still in Little Rock, or another officer of equal rank

¹²⁷ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 24.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 266.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 279.

with him, take command.¹³⁰ Luckily for Banks, the order never made it to him, as it most likely was aboard the transport ship *City Belle*, sunk by Confederate forces near Fort De Russy.¹³¹ Regardless, Banks no longer had the confidence of either his subordinates, or superiors.

Direction from commanders provides the necessary guidance that subordinates need and deserve in order to succeed on the battlefield. Failure to understand, visualize, and describe the operational environment leads to either poor direction, or no direction at all. Halleck demonstrated how vague orders from the highest command leads to confusion and disorder among subordinates. Banks demonstrated how no orders at all leads to a loss of confidence from subordinates and superiors alike.

Lead

Through leadership, commanders provide purpose, direction, and motivation to subordinate commanders, their staff, and Soldiers.

–ADRP 5-0

The purpose, motivation, and direction provided by the leader are very often the difference between victory and defeat, living and dying. Current US doctrine states that, “Purpose gives subordinates the reason to achieve a desired outcome...direction involves communicating what to do to accomplish a mission...[and] motivation provides the will and initiative to do what is necessary to accomplish the mission.”¹³² Whether leading from the front of a cavalry charge, or behind a desk overlooking an array of maps and battle plans, it is the sense of purpose, direction, and motivation that serves as a commonality between the two ends of the spectrum. As the fifth in the series of responsibilities of the commander in the operations process, effective direction by

¹³⁰ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 307.

¹³¹ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 474.

¹³² Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1 August 2012), 1-1, 1-2.

the commander is predicated on the fact that he can adequately understand, visualize, and describe, his operational environment. Though the words “direct” and “lead” may seem similar and are even synonyms for one another, “lead” serves more as a follow-up to the “direct.” A commander will “direct” with a written or verbal order, but then insert the necessary energy to drive forward the plan by leading. The commander does not wait until achieving success in the first four steps of the operations process before he begins to lead. Leading, and leadership, occurs at all times in an operation, as success builds upon success and failure builds upon failure. The commander’s success, or failure, in leading depends upon his ability to build a proper foundation of understanding, visualizing, describing, and directing up to that point. The ability of Union officers to lead their forces during the Red River expedition varied between great success and borderline incompetence.

The Battle of Mansfield had been anything but a victory for the Union. Confusion, chaos, and an all-out retreat marked the first major engagement of the campaign. A number of Union officers performed in an exemplary fashion in the face of such adversity. One such officer was Brigadier General T. E. G. Ransom, commander of XIII Corps. Ransom successfully understood, quickly visualized, and swiftly directed his men in an attempt to counter Taylor’s forces barreling towards him. As the corps commander, Ransom personally moved forward with his skirmishers to reconnoiter the enemy before him, finding “two batteries and a large force of infantry in the line of battle in the edge of the woods...and also considerable bodies of infantry moving down the road.”¹³³ Understanding the enemy situation before him as well as the disposition of his supporting artillery and cavalry, Ransom believed that his men were in position to withstand the initial enemy attack as it commenced. Ransom ordered his forces to advance their right flank based upon his earlier reconnaissance and having observed their movement toward his front.¹³⁴

¹³³ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 265.

¹³⁴ *J.C.C.W.*, 37.

Unfortunately, upon the commencement of combat by Confederate Brigadier General Alfred Mouton's forces, Ransom lead division, led by Colonel William Landrum, collapsed, and was soon surrounded on two flanks.¹³⁵ According to Ransom though "Colonel Landrum...was conspicuous, and ever present encouraging all by his own gallant conduct and judicious dispositions of his men."¹³⁶ During the retreat, Confederate shot struck Ransom in the knee and forced his departure from the battlefield. Despite his early withdrawal, Ransom demonstrated his ability to direct his men based upon his personal involvement and understanding of the conditions before him.

The next example of Union leadership is Banks, the most visible officer during the campaign. Banks demonstrated on multiple occasions both successful and unsuccessful traits of leadership, though the cumulative result led to an overall impression by superiors and subordinates that he was vastly incapable of successfully executing his job. As he maneuvered in and out of political and military realms throughout the campaign, Banks saw greater success with what it was he was knew best, politics. Banks arrived in Alexandria nearly ten days after the bulk of his forces, due primarily to specific guidance from Lincoln. Lincoln placed his initial confidence in Banks, telling him, "I now distinctly tell you that you are master of all, and that I wish you to take the case as you find it, and give us a free-state reorganization of Louisiana, in the shortest possible time."¹³⁷ This equated to Banks taking personal ownership of the Louisiana state election for governor, lieutenant governor, and other elected state officials.¹³⁸ Of three candidates for governor, J. Q. A. Fellows, Michael Hahn, and Benjamin Flanders, Banks put his

¹³⁵ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 134-136.

¹³⁶ *J.C.C.W.*, 38.

¹³⁷ Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 7, ed. Roy P. Basler (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 90.

¹³⁸ Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 169.

entire support behind Hahn.¹³⁹ Hahn and Flanders both previously served terms as congressional representatives from Louisiana and so, were familiar with the significance the state played with loyalty to the Union.¹⁴⁰ With his direction from Lincoln, Banks saw Hahn as the most likely candidate to succeed in the 1864 election, and so used his political sway to back Hahn.¹⁴¹ In an attempt to cast a wide net as to who was eligible to vote, Banks authorized “Citizens of the State who have volunteered for the defense of the country in the Army and Navy” as well as “Citizens of the State who have been expelled from the homes...on account of their devotion to the Union.”¹⁴² With his efforts, Banks aided in the successful election of Hahn who received 90 percent of the soldiers’ votes and was well ahead of Flanders and Fellows.¹⁴³ Proud of his accomplishments, Banks wrote to Halleck regarding the overall election proceedings saying, “I never witnessed such a spectacle elsewhere...that in this State a popular demonstration of such magnitude and friendly spirit to the Government could be attained. It is impossible to describe it with truth.”¹⁴⁴ Though successful in leading a political campaign, Banks’s military campaign was anything but effective.

Banks did not adequately understand his environment nor did he give sufficient direction to his subordinates and so his leadership abilities suffered as a result. Though Banks himself understood the purpose of his campaign, he did not always convey his understanding to his subordinates. Banks failed to give ample or even proper direction to his subordinates. His senior commander, Franklin, perceived no sense of purpose for the expedition, other than an

¹³⁹ Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 169.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁴¹ Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 169.

¹⁴² *O.R.*, ser. 3, vol. 4, 171.

¹⁴³ Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 170.

¹⁴⁴ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 2, 512-513.

“impression...to march into Texas.”¹⁴⁵ Banks’s efforts to motivate his men in the face of enemy fire also proved ineffective, particularly during the battle of Mansfield.

James Ewer of the Third Massachusetts Cavalry recalled a scene during some of the most intense fighting when Banks, who at one point made his way to the front of the fighting, took off his hat yelling “Form a line here. I know you will not desert me.”¹⁴⁶ Banks’s attempt at motivation fell upon deaf and scared ears, as not only the Third Massachusetts, but all of his forces retreated at Mansfield. Ewer’s criticism of Bank’s decision to withdraw was also apparent in his comment that “Had Grant been present, it can easily be imagined that he would have said what he did say at the close of the first day’s Battle of Shiloh,” and the he would have reformed his line and attacked at daybreak.¹⁴⁷ Ewer’s low opinion of Banks, something apparently shared by the men within earshot of his plea, prevented any chance of the general rallying his troops at that particular moment on the battlefield. A.J. Smith, however, proved far more capable than Banks as a battlefield commander.

Smith belonged to Sherman, and as such carried with him the reputation of Sherman’s men. Hailing from the northwestern parts of the then United States, A.J. Smith and his men were of a rougher cut than Franklin’s, referring to Franklin’s men as soldiers on holiday and in return being called gorillas by the Easterners.¹⁴⁸ In fact, Banks himself inadvertently created this nickname for the Smith’s men, when upon their arrival to Alexandria he commented to Porter, “What in the name of Heaven did Sherman send me these ragged guerillas for?”¹⁴⁹ Whether a

¹⁴⁵ *J.C.C.W.*, 31.

¹⁴⁶ James K. Ewer, *The Third Massachusetts Cavalry in the War for the Union* (Maplewood, MA: Historical Committee of the Regimental Association, 1903), 149.

¹⁴⁷ Ewer, *The Third Massachusetts*, 157.

¹⁴⁸ Michael J. Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign of 1864 and the Loss by the Confederacy of the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 58-59.

¹⁴⁹ Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War*, 501.

gorilla or guerilla, there was a marked different between A. J. Smith's and Franklin's men. Despite the opinion held by Banks and Franklin of the Westerners, A.J. Smith could lead and his men could fight. During the Battle of Pleasant Hill, seeing that his fellow commanders were close to collapse, Smith led the charge with infantry in a momentum-shifting counterattack against the rebels with no guidance or input from Banks.¹⁵⁰ This action was significant. It allowed Union forces to gain a foothold in the area. Later that night, Banks rode to Smith to personally shake his hand and say "God bless you, general; you have saved the army."¹⁵¹ Unlike Banks, whose presence with the 3rd Massachusetts had made little impact, Smith motivated his men to charge against the rebels, despite the growing likelihood of being outflanked. Smith demonstrated the reciprocal nature of the relationship between him and his men when told to retreat from Pleasant Hill by Banks. In a letter Porter wrote to Sherman praising the actions of A.J. Smith at Pleasant Hill, he recalled Smith's reaction to being told to retreat and thus having to leave behind his dead, unburied: "The general will never get over it as long as he lives; he cried like a child having to leave his poor fellows on the field."¹⁵² Smith cared for his men passionately; his purpose, motivation, and direction came not simply from a place of obligation, but from an emotional bond with his men. Though serving as the most senior naval officer in the campaign, Porter had his opportunities to demonstrate his ability to lead at the tactical level.

While withdrawing under orders to Alexandria for the last time, Porter faced difficulty keeping one of his vessels, the *Eastport*, afloat and off sand bars. After the *Eastport* ran aground for the final time and the crew could not recover it, Porter decided to destroy the vessel lest it fall into Confederate hands. Porter recalled that, "One ton of power was placed in her in various positions...and at 1:45 p.m., April 26, the Eastport was blown up...The vessel was completely

¹⁵⁰ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 160-162.

¹⁵¹ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 309.

¹⁵² *O.R.*, ser. 3, vol. 34, pt. 3, 170.

destroyed.”¹⁵³ The explosion attracted nearby Confederate infantry who then followed the remaining vessels as they traveled down the Red. Ambushed by both infantry and artillery further down the river, Porter demonstrated great courage under intense enemy fire. While aboard his flagship, the *Cricket*, Porter and the crew received a “pelting shower of shot and shell, which the enemy poured into us—every shot going through and through.”¹⁵⁴ Porter immediately took charge of the gun deck after all crew members were either killed or wounded, ordering and directing freed slaves who were aboard the ship to operate the guns and return fire.¹⁵⁵ Porter then made his way to the engine room, finding a similar situation of death and damaged equipment. Again, Porter personally redirected crewmembers to assume duty in the engine room, while Porter made his way to the pilothouse and took over the vessel himself from the wounded pilot.¹⁵⁶ After the rebel fire subsided and Porter broke free from the ambush, he counted thirty-eight solid shot impacts on the *Cricket* with half of the fifty-man crew either killed or wounded.¹⁵⁷ Despite the significant damage and loss of life among his ranks, Porter’s personal involvement on his flagship motivated not only the remaining crew to continue fighting, but also the remaining vessels in his fleet. Bloodied but not defeated, Porter and his men arrived in Alexandria only to fight rapids and dwindling water levels preventing any further movement south.

Lieutenant Colonel Bailey’s dam unquestionably saved Porter’s fleet, but what may be more important was how Banks served as a major driving force behind the dam’s construction. The procurement of cotton and the seizure of Shreveport fell far short of the original plan. Banks knew he must salvage what he could of the campaign. After ordering the construction of the dam

¹⁵³ *O.R.N.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, 74.

¹⁵⁴ *O.R.N.*, series 1, vol. 26, 74.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

at the recommendation of Bailey and Franklin, Banks became near obsessive about its completion. Porter himself recognized Banks's determination in the endeavor,

To General Banks personally I am much indebted for the happy manner in which he forwarded this enterprise, giving it his whole attention day and night, scarcely sleeping while the work was going on, tending personally to see that all the requirements of Colonel Bailey were complied with on the instant.¹⁵⁸

Banks continually asked for and sent updates on the river's height during the dam construction, waiting for the moment when conditions would support a breakout by the gunboats. During one such personal inspection of the dam, Banks observed the dam close to bursting and so went to notify the vessels upriver.¹⁵⁹ When he then rode upstream to inform the boat pilots, "Scarcely a man or light was to be seen. It was perfectly apparent that the boats were not in condition to take advantage of the completion of the dam."¹⁶⁰ Banks quickly wrote to Porter to ask his men to stand ready and be prepared should they need to act suddenly, which he replied, "Don't suppose because the vessels seem quiet that nothing is being done; everything is being done that can be."¹⁶¹ Despite his claim to readiness, when the dam temporarily ruptured in the early morning darkness of 9 April, only one ship, which stood above the rapids at Alexandria, the *Lexington*, took advantage of the opportunity as the crew stood prepared at that time while all remaining boats stood idle and missed a critical opportunity to move downstream.¹⁶² Banks stood by his claim that the navy provided no help with the dam, as the "construction of the dam was exclusively the work of the army." Porter completely disagreed with Banks's claim of who put more effort into the dam, stating, "No men worked harder in constructing the dam than did the

¹⁵⁸ *O.R.N.*, series 1, vol. 26, 133.

¹⁵⁹ *J.C.C.W.*, 333.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *O.R.N.*, ser. 1, vol. 26, 140.

¹⁶² *J.C.C.W.*, 333.

men of the navy, for they were up to their middle night and day in the water...doing all that they could.”¹⁶³ After troops repaired the original dam and added smaller wing dams to further constrict water flow, water levels reached suitable heights for travel, and by 13 May 1864, Porter and his vessels moved past Alexandria and out of the Red River expedition.¹⁶⁴ Had Banks not made a personal effort to oversee the dam construction, the retreat from Alexandria would have lasted far longer than it originally did.

Most Union leaders had equal moments of greatness and weakness as leaders. Some, such as Banks, performed better under the pressure of knowing they knelt before the chopping block. Others, like A.J. Smith, led not for recognition or personal gain, but for his men. Though present at isolated points across the battlefields and throughout the campaign in limited quantities, Union generals lacked the cumulative leadership needed to defeat the rebels strung between Alexandria and Shreveport.

Assess

Commanders continuously assess the situation to better understand current conditions and determine how the operation is progressing. Continuous assessment helps commanders anticipate and adapt the force to changing circumstances.

–ADRP 5-0

Once a commander sets in motion an operation, in order to ensure subordinates meet his intent, he must constantly assess the progress of his men and their actions. A commander does not have the luxury to remove himself from the operation only to assume that all goes as planned in his absence. This assessment enhances the commander’s original understanding of the operational environment, and so then changes his visualization, description, and direction given to subordinate within the environment. Proper assessment of the operational environment can lead

¹⁶³ *J.C.C.W.*, 280.

¹⁶⁴ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 266.

to a new, or better understanding, of the environment. However, the failure to assess, and reassess, may result in the commander operating under a false set of assumptions or an incomplete understanding of the problem. Even if a commander does constantly assess the situation and make decisions based upon the changing environment, there is no guarantee that those new decision are indeed the best ones. Union officers, all in varying positions of authority during the campaign, demonstrated the results of both making good and bad assessments of the operational environment.

In Banks's defense, he constantly reassessed his operational environment from the first day he set foot in Alexandria. Unfortunately, his assessments of the situations were incorrect and he did little change his understanding. The most significant example of this was Banks's decision to travel west, inland and away from the Red River, after his forces reached Grand Ecore for the first time. While at Grand Ecore, Banks and his chief of staff Brigadier General Charles Stone conferred with a local riverboat pilot, Wellington Withenbury, regarding the road network between Grand Ecore and Shreveport.¹⁶⁵ Withenbury recalled the discussion that he and Stone had regarding discrepancies between his and Stone's map, specifically as to the location of Pleasant Hill.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, Withenbury informed Banks that by crossing the river and going north, he would reach Shreveport in three days, and that by heading west towards Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, he would not see the Red River until Shreveport.¹⁶⁷ A simple solution for Banks to help him reassess his situation would have been to send cavalry reconnaissance elements to confirm the river-crossing route to Shreveport. Franklin directly told Banks himself that he should send an element north to look for roads that might run closer to the Red River and thus provide the option for naval support; however, Banks feared there was not enough time to complete the

¹⁶⁵ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 113.

¹⁶⁶ *J.C.C.W.*, 286.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

necessary reconnaissance and thus arranged for none.¹⁶⁸ The pressure from Grant and Sherman to reach Shreveport and return A. J. Smith east within the thirty-day window added a constant reminder to the limited tactical timeline. Withenbury may also have attempted to protect his own personal supply of cotton held along the west bank of the river when he failed to inform Banks of the known route that paralleled the river, which would take the Union forces directly by his cotton and subject his crop to seizure.¹⁶⁹ Regardless, because of Banks's failure to seek an enhanced understanding of his situation at the time, he set in motion the end for the Union forces. The remaining major decisions Banks made, whether to stay or retreat, did come however, from his constant reassessment of the operational environment.

The first assessment made to retreat came the night after the Battle of Pleasant Hill. Banks did not pursue Taylor west, based upon a number of factors he took into consideration: lack of food and water, a single line dirt road upon which his entire force moved, lack of communication with Porter along the river, and the likelihood of the boats getting stranded on the river.¹⁷⁰ This reassessment caused Banks to believe that the conditions before him were not conducive to victory, even though his decision to retreat disgusted his men and left Porter north along the Red River without land support.¹⁷¹ Once again in Grande Ecore following the retreat from Pleasant Hill, Banks convinced himself the enemy and river conditions were not favorable to victory, and ordered the second retreat, this time to Alexandria.¹⁷² A.J. Smith was one of many subordinates who felt slighted by this decision, and acted out by torching structures and killing

¹⁶⁸ *J.C.C.W.*, 35.

¹⁶⁹ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 76.

¹⁷⁰ *J.C.C.W.*, 326.

¹⁷¹ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, 119.

¹⁷² *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 190.

livestock on a trail of destruction returning through to Alexandria.¹⁷³ Regardless, Banks's assessment of the environment at he saw it, led him to believe that retreat was his only remaining option. From a distance, Grant made his own assessment of the campaign.

Grant communicated with Banks throughout the campaign through situation reports and direct orders. Grant, kept abreast of the situation by letters sent to him by Banks and Halleck, expressed his initial concerns with the timing of the campaign before it ever began. His first letter to Banks made clear his expectations that he must take Shreveport as soon as possible, not give up any ground west of the Mississippi already gained, and that Banks should expect involvement in an upcoming spring campaign, "even if it leads to the abandonment of the main object of your campaign."¹⁷⁴ As news of Banks's difficulties began to reach Grant, his assessment of the campaign changed and his guidance to Banks became more specific. Grant's second letter to Banks was far more specific, telling Banks to turn over control of the Red River to Steele upon successfully seizing Shreveport and to abandon all but a few locations in Texas along the Rio Grande. Grant also gave Banks recommendations on the exact number of troops needed to participate in the upcoming Mobile campaign.¹⁷⁵ Seeing that Banks's campaign was all but lost, Grant sent orders both through Major General David Hunter and directly from his hand to Banks, telling him that had he, "commenced to move from Shreveport to the interior of Texas, or away from the Red River in any direction, retrace your steps on receipt of this [order]. No matter what you [Banks] have in contemplation, commence your concentration to be followed without delay by your advance to Mobile."¹⁷⁶ Upon receipt of this order, Banks responded that he was hesitant to call his campaign short, as "it will be difficult to concentrate any considerable force from the

¹⁷³ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 224-225.

¹⁷⁴ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 610-611.

¹⁷⁵ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 11.

¹⁷⁶ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 192.

army on the Mississippi for operations against Mobile with such and active and powerful enemy in the rear.”¹⁷⁷ Nearly two weeks later, however, Banks ordered the retreat of his forces to Alexandria.¹⁷⁸

Grant and Halleck both pursued the removal of Banks from the campaign. Halleck had warned Grant of the political implications of removing such a well-connected officer like Banks, but that if the word came to Lincoln from Grant himself, Halleck would likely have supported Grant.¹⁷⁹ No record exists of any such official request reaching Lincoln, though on 7 May 1864, Major General E. R. S. Canby replaced Banks as the commander of the Department of the Gulf, “invested with all the power and authority which the President can confer upon you.”¹⁸⁰ Grant’s assessment, and reassessments of Banks’ performance proved vital to removing the primary cause of the campaign’s failure; Major General Nathaniel P. Banks.

Conclusion

Bank’s operations in the West are about what should have been expected from a general so utterly destitute of military education and military capacity. It seems but little better than murder to give important commands to such men as Banks.

– *O.R.*, series 1, vol. 34, part 3

The ashes of Alexandria, Louisiana hung in the warm spring air as a silent observer to a failed campaign and the weary Union soldiers below. Pro-Union Louisianans who had previously sworn oaths of allegiance to the Union just weeks earlier, stood next to the charred remnants of their homes and cursed and wailed alongside the eastbound formation of troops who receded like

¹⁷⁷ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, 189.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁷⁹ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 409-410.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 491-492.

the waters of the Red River itself.¹⁸¹ Locals later swore under oath that A. J. Smith gave the order to burn the homes.¹⁸² Grant delayed his attempt to capture Mobile by ten months due to the serious disruptions in his timeline, caused by the ineffective Red River Campaign.¹⁸³ By 20 May 1864, the last few Union soldiers had withdrawn across another of Lieutenant Colonel Bailey's aquatic creations, an ad hoc pontoon bridge over the Atchafalaya River near Simmesport, Louisiana.¹⁸⁴ This crossing marked the end of a seventy-odd day "damn blunder from beginning to end."¹⁸⁵ Despite the senior involvement of Lincoln, Halleck, and Grant, Banks and his subordinates had failed to secure the much-needed cotton. After Canby came to relieve Banks, he addressed the remaining soldiers of the campaign, criticizing the campaign openly in response to cheers from soldiers shouting "We want to see Gen. Banks punished; we want to see him hung" with some refusing to fight until proof of Banks's punishment.¹⁸⁶

As is most often the case with military losses, either large or small, those involved look to distribute the weight of responsibility as unevenly as possible, while trying to maintain their names and characters despite being christened the source of failure, either legitimately or perceived. For those senior commanders who participated in the Red River Campaign of 1864, assignment of blame passed between one another even before the campaign's conclusion. All senior commanders involved had their own opinions as to why the campaign failed and who to

¹⁸¹ Lawrence Van Alstyne, *Diary of an Enlisted Man* (New Haven, CT: Tuttle, Morehouse, and Taylor, 1910), 321.

¹⁸² *The Conduct of Federal Troops in Western Louisiana During The Invasion of 1863 and 1864. Compiled from Sworn Testimony under Direction of Governor Henry W. Allen. Shreveport, April 1865* (Shreveport, LA: News Printing Establishment, 1866), 189.

¹⁸³ Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, 279.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹⁸⁵ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End*, xix.

¹⁸⁶ *The Conduct of Federal Troops in Western Louisiana*, 89.

hold responsible. Ultimately though, the defeat manifested through a failure of senior Union leadership to understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead, and assess.

During his congressional testimony in March 1865, Banks attributed his defeat to “The difficulties in navigation, the imperfect concentration of forces, the incautious march of the 8th of April [Franklin], and the limited time allotted to the expedition.”¹⁸⁷ Banks believed that Union forces were their own worst enemy, and that the enemy played little if any part the defeat.¹⁸⁸ Banks also took the opportunity to place a hefty dose of blame on Porter and his navy, confessing “that every position of difficulty in which the army was placed in [the] campaign was the immediate and direct consequence of delay in the operation of the navy.”¹⁸⁹ In his closing words to Congress, Banks attempted to maintain his honor admitting that “A commanding officer is of course responsible for all that occurs to his command, whatever may have been the cause. I do not shrink from the responsibility.”¹⁹⁰ Ultimately, Banks was unprepared for the campaign in every sense of the word.

Banks did not understand the military aspects of the campaign nearly as well as he did the political. His personal background in northern textile mills and robust political career prior to the war more than qualified him to speak as somewhat of an authority on both issues. What he lacked personally, and to the detriment of every soldier under his authority, was a military understanding of the campaign. Banks’s military career began with the war. He was not a product of any military academy and he had no prior military experience. His understanding of military tactics and operations developed in the face of the enemy, through baptisms by fire. As such, he relied upon others to do his heavy tactical and operational lifting for him. He knew the overarching

¹⁸⁷ *J.C.C.W.*, 340.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹⁸⁹ *J.C.C.W.*, 338.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 339.

strategic objective, but he lacked the ability to assume the role of a capable planner and commander in order to effectively connect tactical actions on the ground to meet his and Lincoln's endstate. During the Red River expedition, that responsibility lay in the hands of Franklin, Ransom, Lee, A. J. Smith, and Porter, to name a few. Because Banks did not adequately understand the environment, every subsequent recommendation or order he gave sent his men further from the desired endstate. In the case of taking the road to Mansfield from Grand Ecore, this literally took his men physically further away from the cotton and Shreveport. Colonel William Shaw of the XVI Corps summarized it best in a letter regarding Banks and Pleasant Hill, in which he wrote, "I might refer to Gen. Banks' reports, but it shows such a total want of knowledge of the location of his forces and the operations of the day, or such a total disregard of truth as to place it beneath criticism."¹⁹¹

Had Banks had a greater level of military understanding, he might have made decisions more appropriate to the conditions of his environment. To postulate what exact actions Banks should have taken to ensure victory must also take into account every possible enemy reaction. To do this, however, is far beyond the scope of historical analysis. However, there are a few major decisions that Banks made in the campaign that a better-prepared general might have possibly approached differently. First, rather than focus on Alexandria and arriving there with the bulk of his men, Banks had instead focused on organizing Hahn's election ceremony, and so arrived nearly two weeks late. Banks did not account for the impact that his presence might have had on the navy's decision to set about securing cotton. Banks's understanding of the situation in Alexandria was two weeks behind every other leader in town. Second, Banks neglected to send a reconnaissance force out from Grand Ecore to confirm or deny the presence of a road that paralleled the Red River. Because he did not, Banks's soldiers blundered into Confederate forces

¹⁹¹ John Scott, *Story of the Thirty-Second Iowa Infantry Volunteers* (Nevada, IA: John Scott, 1896), 186.

leading to a defeat at Mansfield and retreat from Pleasant Hill. This is not to say that the Union forces would have avoided contact with Taylor and his men altogether, but the circumstance under which they met might have been far different. Third, Banks did not stand firm in his original decision, and instead withdrew from Pleasant Hill, which sank the morale of his men. As many soldiers and their leaders knew very little as to why they had even embarked on the campaign, morale was all that some had motivating them. Even if Banks had chosen not stay at Pleasant Hill, then at least he could have retired to the river twenty miles to the east, rather than Grand Ecore, forty miles to the southeast. This action would have given him access to his transport ships and additional infantry under the command of Brigadier General Kilby Smith. In the end, Mansfield and Pleasant Hill stood as the high-water mark for Banks's forces and the success of the campaign. Standing so low in the opinion of his subordinates, peers, and superiors, Banks had become a pariah in blue wool. In the absence of orders or coordination from Banks, Franklin, Smith, and Porter acted independently, as they saw fit, sometime for their own favor, sometimes for their men's. Regardless, because Banks could not understand or visualize the operational environment, he lacked the ability to consistently describe, direct, and lead his men.

To place equal responsibility on the shoulders of Franklin and his division commanders, or on Porter and his subordinates is unfair to the lot. Though not technically in Banks's chain of command, as neither Halleck nor Grant had created a single command headquarters for the campaign, these men still took their direction from Banks. They relied on his understanding of the greater picture and trusted, at least initially, that his requests and recommendations were in the best interest of the campaign. As the campaign progressed, their trust eroded in Banks's ability to act in the best interests of the Union Army. Franklin became less impressed with the overall ability of Banks to lead, testifying to Congress, "from what I had seen of General Banks's ability to command in the field, I was certain than an operation dependent upon plenty of troops, rather than upon skill in handling them, was the only one which would have probability to success in his

hands.”¹⁹² By the end, A. J. Smith wanted nothing more to do with Banks and the campaign, telling Banks’s chief of staff, Brigadier General William Dwight, “This army knows full well that I am not responsible for any mishaps that have occurred during this campaign.”¹⁹³

Every Union leader had both exceptional and reprehensible moments on the battlefield. Some of these moments occurred in the face of the enemy while others occurred in the relative safety of a headquarters away from contact. No matter where a commander located himself, because he could not successfully understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead and assess his subordinates, he would fail, leading to the debacle known now as the Red River Campaign.

¹⁹² *J.C.C.W.*, 35.

¹⁹³ *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 3, 535.

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